



HAND-REARING ORPHAN DEER – THE BASICS

Taking on the rearing of a very young fawn is no small task, and you should be well aware of the time and effort that will be required if the animal is to do well, and not suffer. If you have no previous experience I believe that you should make contact with a veterinarian immediately and identify a source of advice and assistance. The fawn's welfare is the major issue.

The principles of rearing orphan deer are no different to those that apply to lambs and cattle calves. In comparing chital and red deer the main difference would be in the amount of milk which each would require at a feed, based purely on size. The success or otherwise of rearing orphans depends first of all on how old and in what condition they are in when you start, but never underestimate how much time and effort is required. My suggestion is to avoid hand rearing deer calves unless it is absolutely necessary.

Basics

It is important to quickly get the fawn into a routine which does not interfere with your life too much. Make sure they have a warm spot to hide in. The first few days are critical to its survival as its mother is not around to protect it. After the first two feeds you are "the mother". A call as you enter its territory will bring it scampering up to you for a feed.

Feeding

As a rule of thumb, a fawn requires 15-20% of its body weight in feed intake to grow at a satisfactory rate.

The first three to four weeks are very critical. The fawn is still developing its immune system. Keep all your feeding equipment clean. Always check the texture of the faeces.

See Fact Sheet "Orphan Deer 2 - Feeding"

Toilet

One of the joys of motherhood is that the mother ingests the faeces of her fawn. There are two reasons for this behaviour. First, the hind may be trying to remove all traces of the young's existence so that less predators will be attracted to the area. Secondly, the mother may be picking up any bugs or problems with which the undeveloped immune system cannot yet cope. The mother sorts out the problem in her system and puts the required antibodies in her milk to help the fawn out until its own immune system can cope.

If you wipe the anus of the fawn while it is sniffing around the bottle it may induce it to drink. It will induce it to defecate. Just wipe the anus clean with a moist cloth while the fawn is drinking.

Diarrhoea

If a calf develops diarrhoea then she will need oral fluids (eg. Lactade, Vytrate) in addition to the calf supplement. Do not give her these fluids closer than 4 hours to a milk substitute feed, so that there is no interference with clot formation in the abomasum. Do not take her off the milk supplement (this is an out-dated notion), and only use injectable antibiotics if there is a fever (above 39.5 degrees C).

If the fawn does develop diarrhoea and is very sick and off feed you should consult your veterinarian.

Constipation

This is not very common, but if you think your calf may be constipated, a dose of 5 ml of paraffin oil will help, given with a syringe. Make sure your calf is swallowing - don't put any on the lungs.

Poisonous garden plants

Be aware that some garden plants may be poisonous for your calf. If you are uncertain, it is best to keep them away from potentially harmful specimens. Common garden plants which can be harmful include: oleander, lantana and rhododendron.

Deer as Pets

If all goes well, and you end up with a "pet", your problems are just beginning. A female hand reared fawn is not a problem. They may be demanding and continually get in the road but their quietness may be beneficial to your herd in the paddock as she grows up.

Hand raised MALE deer are always DANGEROUS unless they are castrated before puberty. Any hand raised buck that is not castrated eventually becomes aggressive, and has the potential to very seriously injure or even kill people - and other animals. If you cannot have him castrated pre-puberty you should not take the risk of keeping him.

See *also* Fact Sheet "Castration".